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ABSTRACT

The School Transition to Employment Partnership (STEP) Employability Curriculum is a competency-based evaluation and training program for special needs students, designed to ensure successful transition from school to employment. The STEP curriculum was developed through a partnership of state and local education agencies, representatives of state and local vocational rehabilitation personnel, and private industry. The STEP curriculum consists of 27 individual components across 3 major domains: Employability I, Survival Skills and Problem Solving; Employability II, Career Development and Job Seeking Skills; and Employability III, Job Keeping and Work Maturity. The STEP curriculum was implemented in 12 member school districts affiliated with the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, serving western South Dakota. The results of the initial field test of 75 students revealed that approximately 60 percent of students were able to obtain and maintain employment upon completion of the STEP program. Students who master on-the-job competencies were able to maintain employment, work more hours per week, and to earn a higher hourly wage than students who did not master the competencies. Specific analysis of the STEP competencies indicated that a student's on-the-job performance (Employability III) was significantly correlated with maintaining employment. Further, specific traits that were found to be correlated with employment included task completion, punctuality, and developing a career plan. (KS)

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School Transition to Employment Partnership (STEP): Employability Curriculum

RC 018527

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School Transition to Employment Partnership (STEP): Employability Curriculum

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Abstract

The STEP curriculum is a competency based evaluation and training program for special needs students, designed to ensure successful transition from school to employment. The STEP curriculum was developed through the South Dakota Statewide Task Force on School/Business Partnerships. The task force included private sector businesses; special educators; vocational educators; school administrators; representatives of the departments of Education and Cultural Affairs, Labor and Vocational Rehabilitation; advocates; and parents of adolescents with handicapping conditions. The STEP curriculum consists of 27 individual components across three major domains: Employability I - Survival skills/Problem solving; Employability II - Career Development/Job Seeking Skills; and Employability III - Job Keeping/Work Maturity. The STEP curriculum was implemented in 12 member school districts affiliated with the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, serving western South Dakota. Results of the initial field test suggest that students who master on the job competencies have a higher probability of maintaining employment; and, specific competencies were found to be correlated with employment outcomes. Approximately 60% of the students were able to obtain and maintain employment upon completion of the STEP progam.

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School Transition to Employment Partnership (STEP): Employability Curriculum

One of society's major expectations of schools is that the educational system will prepare students for entry into the world of work and self sufficiency (West, 1988). However as Rhodes (1986) noted, many former students with severe disabilities were at home without services following graduation. Similarly, Ryan (1988) summarized the findings of Rusch and Phelps (1987) followup study which found:

- 10-12% of the total school population is disabled.
- 67% of all disabled Americans between the ages of 16 and 64 do not work.
- Of those that do work, they are 75% more likely to be working no more than part time.
- Of those that do not work, 67% of them report they would work if the opportunity existed.

As reported by Wright, Emener, and Ashley (1988), since 1970, more than 2.5 million youth with disabilities have left the nation's public school system with only 23% either fully employed or enrolled in college; 40% were underemployed and earning wages at or near the poverty level; and 26% were unemployed and on welfare.

Recent initiatives and mandates by the federal, state, and local educational agencies, have called for the development of effective programs and services to facilitate the transition from school to work (Will, 1984). Transition is not a single program, separate and apart from other programs such as special education, vocational education, guidance, and/or career education; rather, each compnent is integrated within the transition process (West,1988). Thus, effective transition requires the development of a partnership among all interested parties (state and local educational programs, state and local adult service providers, consumers and their parents, and local businesses) to identify roles and responsbilites to ensure the student's success in adult life. Boyer-Stephens and Kearns (1988) state that transition encompasses more than employment in a specific job (Boyer-Stephens & Kearns, 1988). Students need to acquire related functional skills to keep the job, adjust to independent living in the community, and utilize free time constructively. This can best be accomplished through the development and implementation of a functional curriculum.

A functional curriculum is designed to prepare students for vocational opportunities that are avalible in their communities (Lagomarcino & Rusch, 1987). A functional curriculum is charaterized by being:

- community referenced, (i.e., focuses upon the basic demands required for adult life in one's own community);
- integrated, (i.e., allows students with disabilities to work alongside non disabled co-workers);
- longitudinal, (i.e., acquiring a list of the vocational, social, and work related skills that potential employers believe are critical for job entry so that teachers may develop a coordinated and longitudinal curriculum) ; and
- community based, (i.e., secondary instructional content and training should occur in community-relevant settings).

As summarized by Boyer-Stephens and Kearns (1988), teachers must address the needs of each student by going beyond the classroom.

Examples of functional vocational curriculums have been reviewed by Boyer-Stephens and Kearns (1988), Feichtner (1988), and Schmitt, Growick, and Klien (1988). However, as West (1988) indicated transition models need to be tested and modified. The purpose of this article is to describe the development and initial validation of the School Transition to Employment Partnership (STEP): Employability Curriculum.

The STEP curriculum is a competency based evaluation and training program, for special needs students, designed to facilitate the transition from school to employment. The STEP curriculum was developed through the South Dakota Statewide Task Force on School/Business Partnerships. The task force included private sector businesses; special educators; vocational educators; school administrators; representatives of the South Dakota Departments of Education and Cultural Affairs, Labor, and Vocational Rehabilitation; advocates; and parents of adolescents

with handicapping conditions. The STEP curriculum consists of 27 individual competencies across three major domains: Employability I - Survival skills/Problem solving; Employability II - Career Development/Job Seeking Skills; and Employability III - Job Keeping/Work Maturity. Each stated competency is comprised of specific units of mastery. The curriculum modules for Employability I and Employability II were designed to be taught in classroom settings, i.e., resource rooms. Employability III competencies were taught on the job within a community based supported employment setting. Specific competencies within each module of the STEP curriculum include:

Employability I

1. Knowledge of work related problems.
2. Problem solving.
3. Knowledge of available services.
4. Developing a budget
5. Money management
6. Knowledge of transportation alternatives

Employability II

1. Career decision making
2. Developing a career plan
3. Awareness of entry level jobs
4. Labor market information
5. Writing a letter of application
6. Completing applications
7. Employer phone contacts
8. Completing a resume & personal fact sheet
9. Job interviews
10. Post interview follow-up
11. Completing W-4 Form
12. Completing an insurance form

Employability III

1. Punctuality
2. Attendance
3. Attitude/Behavior
4. Appearance
5. Interpersonal Relations
6. Task Completion

Each competency is further broken down into specific learning activities and checklists that the instructor utilizes for assessment and instruction in the classroom and community based supported employment sites.

Method

Subjects

A total of 75 students were enrolled in the STEP curriculum during the 1989/90 school year. All students received special education services from 12 local school districts, which are members of the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, in western South Dakota. A description of the 75 students is provided in table 1.

Table 1. Student Demographics

Average Student Age	17.8 years		Sex: Females (number)		25
range	16 - 21		Males		50
Ethnic Origin: Afro American		2	Hispanic	1	
Caucasian		55	Native American	17	
Number of Students by Grade Level					
12th Grade		33			
11th Grade		42			
Disability (number)					
Economic Disadvantage		15			
Learning Disability		47			
Mental Retardation					
Mild		11			
Moderate		2			
Academic Abilities (Grade Level Equvilents)					
Average Reading Level		5.9			
(range)		(.5 - 12.9)			
Average Math Level		5.9			
(range)		(.5 - 11.5)			
Intellectual Quotient (N = 61)					
Average		78.4			
(range)		(50 - 108)			

Employment Outcomes

All students received instruction through the STEP curriculum during the school year. At the end of the school year, students were separated into one of four groups depending upon employment outcomes. Group 1 consisted on students who completed high school (graduated or GED) and were competitively employed, (N = 26). Group 2 consisted of (11th grade)students who were still enrolled in the STEP curriculum, (N = 31). Group 3 was comprised of students who dropped out of high school and did not complete the STEP curriculum, (N=3). Group 4 consisted of students who completed high school but had not maintained competitive employment, (N= 15).

Results

Demographic information regarding each the groups of students is presented in Table 2. Analyses of variance revealed significant differences among groups for grade, age, IQ, and reading ability ($p \leq .02$). Scheffee pair wise comparisons were conducted which found the IQ scores for Group 1 to be significantly different ($p \leq .05$) than Group 2. No other significant pairwise comparisions were found.

Table 2. Subject Demographics by Vocational Outcome

	N	Mean Age	Sex M	Sex F	Mean Grade	Mean IQ	Reading Ability	Math Ability
Group 1	26	18.5	17	8	12	82.3	6.3	6.2
Group 2	31	17.3	25	6	11	73.7	4.7	4.9
Group 3	3	17.3	1	2	11.3	87.0	8.3	9.6
Group 4	15	17.7	6	9	12	80.9	7.2	6.82

Types of Job Placements

Students were placed in jobs with over 50 different employers within the Black Hills area. The diversity of employers and types of jobs is reflected by the job categories in which students were placed. (see Table 3)

Table 3. Titles of Job Placements

Job Title	Number of Students
Building Maintenance	4
Car Detailing	2
Cashier	2
Child Care Aide	2
Clerical/Office/File Clerk	7
Construction/Laborer	4
Custodial/Janitorial/Housekeeping	16
Dietary Aide	1
Dishwasher/Kitchen Help	7
Food Service	9
Jewelry Maker	3
Lathe Grader	1
Laundry Worker	1
Librarian Assistant	2
Meat Cutter	1
Mechanic's Helper	4
Nurse's Aide	1
Pottery Detailer	1
Receptionist	1
Service Station Attendant	2
Sign Painter	1
Stock Clerk	2
Welder	1

Wage and Hour Data

The mean hourly wage, mean number of hours worked per week, and the number of months employed for each of the four groups is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Hour and Wage Data

	Mean Hourly Wage	Mean Hours per Week	Months Employed
Group 1	3.56	24.0	7.5
range	(3.35 - 4.50)	(10 - 40)	(1-12)
Group 2	3.36	12.5	4.9
range	(3.35 - 3.50)	(5 - 20)	(1-12)
Group 3	3.35	11.6	2.6
range	(3.35)	(10 - 15)	(2-3)
Group 4	3.35	15.5	5.0
range	(3.35)	(10 - 40)	(2-8)
TOTAL	3.42	17.1	5.7

Analyses of variance were computed which found significant differences ($p \leq .002$) between the four groups in the hourly wage earned, number of hours worked per week, and the number of months employed. Scheffee pair wise comparisons were conducted which found Group 1 to be significantly different ($p \leq .05$) than Groups 2 and 4, among hourly wages, hours worked per week, and number of months employed.

STEP Competencies

Further analyses were conducted regarding the relationship of STEP competencies to employment outcomes. Table 5 presents the mean number of STEP competencies obtained for Groups 1, 3, and 4. Students in Group 2 were still enrolled in the STEP program, however had not completed the STEP curriculum nor high school.

Table 5 Mean number of STEP competencies completed.

	Employability 1	Employability 2	Employability 3
Group 1	4.8	9.8	5.6
Group 3	4.0	8.0	2.5
Group 4	4.8	8.4	3.9
Total Possible	6	12	6

Analyses of variance indicated that there were no significant differences between groups in the number of competencies completed in Employability 1 and Employability 2. However, a significant difference ($p \leq .0000$) in total competencies completed in Employability 3 among groups was found. The Scheffee analysis revealed that Group 1 was signficantly different ($p \leq .05$) from groups 2 and 3.

A stepwise multiple regression was computed to determine which specific competencies within Employability I, II, or III were related to successful employment outcomes. The analysis was conducted using Group 1 and Group 4, indiviudals who had completed high school. Group 3 was omitted from the analysis because they had not completed the STEP program. A comparison of the total number of competencies achieved within Employability 1, Employability 2, and Employability 3, revealed that Employability 3 total was significantly correlated with employment (r square of .48, $p \leq .000$). Specific competencies where then utilized in the regression, which resulted in the following equation:

$$\text{Employment} = .26 + .58(\text{E3 C6}) + 1.23(\text{E2 C2}) + .39(\text{E3 C1}) - .11(\text{EMP 1})$$

(r square = .66, $p \leq .000$, standard error =.29)

E3 C6 = Employability III, competency 6: task completion (students are rated on 11 traits)
E2 C2 = Employability II, competency 2: developing a career plan
E3 C1 = Employability III, competency 1: punctuality
EMP1 = total number of competencies completed Employability 1

Discussion

The STEP Employability Curriculum was developed through a partnership of state and local education agencies, representatives of state and local vocational rehabilitation personnel, and private industry. The challenge presented to the task force was to develop a list of competencies that employers identified as necessessary to obtain employment in entry level jobs. The STEP curriculum appears to be an effective program for transition from school to the world of work. Approximately 60% of the students were able to obtain and maintain employment upon completion of high school.

The results of the initial field test revealed that students who were able to gain and maintained employment upon completion of high school (Group 1) worked on the job longer, worked more hours per week, and earned a higher mean hourly wage than students who did not maintain employment (Group 4). Demographic variables of grade, age, IQ, Reading Abilitiy, and Math Ability were not signficantly different between Group 1 and Group 4 students, nor were these demographic variables found to be related to employment outcomes. It is interesting to note that the mean IQ for 11th grade students enrolled in the program (Group 2) was lower than Groups 1 and 4, and also obtained lower reading and mathematic ability scores. This may suggest that the schools are including students with more severe disabilities in the STEP curriculum.

Specific analysis of the STEP competencies indicated that a student's on the job performance (Employability III) was significantly correlated with maintaining employment. Thus the competencies identified appear to be related to successful transtion. Further, specific traits that were found to be correlated with employment included task completion, punctuality, and developing a career plan. The supported employment research has also shown task completion and punctuality to be related to maintaining employment (Hill, Wehman, Hill, & Goodall, 1986). Developing a career plan was also correlated with maintaining employment. This underlies the importance of effective vocational education and career planning programs for students with disabilities.

The results obtained reflect the performance of 75 students from 12 school districts in western South Dakota. Thus, generalizations to other students and settings must be tentative. Follow up studies regarding job stability and terminations of these students are being planned.

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